

Education Governance Responses
Ludlow Meeting (1/29/07) – Ludlow Elementary School

25 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu, aided by Emanuel Betz and Kate Cassi O'Neill)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?

Advantages

Perceived local control
More input from each school
Grade 7-12 school choice
Ability of people to attend local meetings
School sharing resources
Focus on your school
Sense of ownership breeds pride
Small schools
Belonging/community
Personalized attention
Teacher to student ratio
Budgeting – only focused on one school
Better understanding of local environment
Direct control of local budget
Equal representation on the supervisory board
Tax impact is personal (sees tax output more directly in play)
Individual attention (faces to names – not just numbers)
Costs savings
Efficiency at meetings

Disadvantages

High administrative budget
Micro-managing boards
Lack of sufficiency
Rural geography
No true 7-12 school choice for all schools – Approval process
Number of school boards
Duplication of work
Cumbersome
Number of meetings for superintendent
Small schools
Cost per pupil
Allows for conflicts between communities which prevents change
Inequity in facility
Lack of uniformity in policy
Complexity
No money
Redundancy
More contracts to deal with
Inefficient use of resources

Inconsistency in policies
Curriculum not necessarily aligned among all schools feeding into high school
Hard to find board members because too many positions to fill
No global vision
Lack of diversity
No economy of scale for business office
Rely too much on superintendent, principals untapped
Overwork for the few community board members we can find
May not have board qualified to negotiate skillfully with teachers
Repeated answering of questions/issues
Superintendent spending too little time on students & more time in board meetings
Personalities make needed change difficult
High administrative costs
Focusing in too many different areas
Only one opportunity for education – “one choice”
More focus on individual instead of what’s best for all kids
More money = less time with superintendent

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

More money to students, less to administration
Simpler
More focus on education & vision, less on board management
More consistent policies
Social capital
Ability to attract superintendents
Less emotion-based decision making
Fewer schools
Can meet current lack of certified superintendents need
Move staff/use resources among schools
Special Education efficient
Sharing ideas among more schools
Board size would have better representation if large census
More unified voice
Cost savings (?)
Efficiencies/streamlined boards, business office, super services
Single vision
Fewer meetings for superintendent
Fewer negotiated contracts
One budget
One vision/set of goals
One board focused on total education of child, K-12
Board has more time to focus on student achievement
Not as many school board members needed
May decrease superintendent’s position to .5 FTE

Disadvantages

Large town dominance
Building ownership? Available for other uses?
Less accessibility to board members
Less child-centered decision making
Small population lose their ability to keep schools open/buildings not being sold
Too much power to superintendents
Union negotiations – one contract costs more
People with more time to campaign (devote to running) or weaker member on board
Superintendent would not bring enough diversity into hiring process (need lay people involved)
Loss of representation due to small census
Rural geography
Won't help sending towns in the need for building renovations
Possibility of losing superintendent
Drop in administrative budget?
Micro-managing?
How much is taxpayers' savings? Especially for sending towns?
All towns would not feel they have equal say on the school in their town-weighted voting
More populated town could commit other towns to things the less populated don't agree with
Possible school closings
Threatens communities
Voters feeling disconnected
Boards feeling disconnected
No financial advantages evident

Other Ideas

Addition of PTA style advisory board
Board consolidation but alignment by grade level
Consolidate from 63 to 14 superintendent offices
Revisit funding to address inequities between sending & receiving towns
Cost savings study
Allowance for district boundaries to be adjusted based on geography
Meetings should address financial matters
One superintendent per county
Collapse 63 unions into 14 counties or technical schools.
Eliminate 49/46 superintendent budgets using the \$500,000 which would save approximately \$28 million with the understanding that no school would close for 3 years
Divide to match the Dept. of Children & Families, then make Agency of Human Services do the same. State wide division same – Education/Social Service/Mental Health
Look outside the state for other models
One model may not work for entire state – not a cookie cutter due to landscape and transportation.
State take over Special Education costs
State take control of escalating health care costs
Capital projects out of funding formula
State transportation
Needs to come from the top – will fail every time if up to local SU's to try- fear of losing local control.
Greater use of technology could create efficiencies – more funding needed

One superintendent & one board (based on geography)

Merge two unions into one district

Assessment of school structures – if need for repairs give reprieve to sending towns in order to renovate the schools.

Level the playing field for gold towns – retain portion of 16 million (Ludlow), money allows us to make major capital improvements

Group conversations

Very upset that the Commissioner says he wants to hear us but fails to attend. I do not buy the cop-out given in the DVD that his presence is a distraction. If he truly is a leader, he would be able to keep the conversations focused on the topic. Especially given that this is such an important discussion.

Supervisory Union costs out of \$1.2 billion. How much?

Why a reduction in school boards?

Let principals run the schools w/ boards and principal working together

Would prefer Commissioner's presence

We want to talk about the "other issues"

We need to talk more than about cost, but also about education – we're here for the kids

Heavy representation from school boards – not a lot of community representation here

How are communities notified of these meetings?

If you want community support, put mailings out to parents & direct mailing to community

Have a camera at each meeting – hear the passion, hear all the thoughts

Addendum:

Teacher Contracts:

- State-wide teacher contracts to save time/energy on negotiations
- Allow teachers the ability to move amongst districts without needing to worry about size of school to stay competitive
- State level health care plan to allow for competitive pricing

Agency of Human Services/Department of Children Services:

- Place more of their services for families and children within the school settings and blend funding supports.
- Supply funding within Act 264 process to decrease the future need for residential placement/day program placements/and family separation.
- Eliminate duplication of services for our students that are in Special Education

Special Education:

- Ask the State of Vermont to have a case manager for all students that are eligible for Special Education, and in the Department of Children and Families custody (state's custody). These children require even more specialized monitoring and funding to assist local schools with their needs. (Especially considering they move amongst districts frequently)
- As State college system to assist regional areas with specialized instructional models and training sites to best serve families and children with needs.

I am a true Vermonter. The amount of time my family before me has owned, farmed, and gone to school in this state is too long to even keep track of. The stories that have been handed down are many, but the stories are getting to be very few. The land is not full of stories anymore, they are costly. The schools/classes are the same size as when I went to school in Ludlow. Why then do they say that they are smaller? Is it because the people have to pay so much more for the service? The class size is the same and the graduating class is the same and sometimes more. What is it then? Is it the fact that the money is going to other towns and thus programs here are being cut in order to make it work? When the costs have gone up, our land values haven't increased accordingly. The tax on our land has more than tripled in the last 10 years. At this point in time, my tax is more than my mortgage. Something has to give. I have taught in the educational field for 21 years and sacrificed all my life to stay the Vermonter I was meant to be. But how can this stay my way of life? What do we expect the future to be? In order to live in Ludlow, we need to work somewhere else so how can we make a community out of a place that we can't even spend much time in? Of course our schools suffer because of this.